

Ericka Ovette

Ericka Ovette is an island girl. Or, put more precisely, two very different islands have a claim on her heart. Born and raised on Manhattan Island in the heart of New York City, Ericka listened avidly to any and all music that came her way from Tchaikovsky to the Temptations: "My mother had a collection of instrumental jazz recordings by the likes of Count Basie and Duke Ellington that I listened to on the hi-fi. There were also recordings by crooner Bill Briscoe, Eydie Gorme and Johnny Mathis. My Aunt Olive Abbott, who was partial to Marian Anderson's beautiful contralto, was also very involved with promoting African American classical performers such as Armenta Adams and Phillippa Schuyler through her social club, The Music and Arts Society. That same aunt used to rent rooms in her apartment to college students many from newly independent African Countries like Sierra Leone, or the Caribbean. Her apartment was always full of a mixture of American R&B, Highlife and calypso and the beautiful music of Mirian Makeba."

But Ericka traces other musical influences to a somewhat smaller island, Tortola in the BVI: "I spent a great deal of time there in the home of my great uncle, Sir James Olva Georges and my great Aunt Egberta. I guess she was my first accompanist, playing children's hymns from the Anglican Hymnal for me on Sunday afternoons. And Uncle Olva would sometimes take me up to the Methodist church when he played the organ. What a rich and beautiful sound! But music was everywhere on Tortola. August Monday Festival in particular produced a glut of calypso music with its earthy rhythms and clever lyrics. Much to Auntie's dismay I was soon singing along, although I suppose much of the content sailed over my head unnoticed. One of my favorite memories is of falling asleep to the sounds of music coming from the Harbour Lights Restaurant just across the street from my Uncle's house. I can still hear the bass line to Ben E. King's "Stand by Me" melting into the warm summer night. It's impossible to quantify the effect of this kind of musical exposure, but it is all part of my musical identity." But as she reached young adulthood it was the music of Ella Fitzgerald, Sarah Vaughan and Nancy Wilson and Nina Simone that most captured her attention and influenced her vocal style.

CAREER BEGINNINGS

Ericka began her professional career in Zimbabwe with Body & Soul, a popular band that performed a mix of jazz and local pop tunes. Ovette credits lead guitarist Timothy Makaya with encouraging her to pursue music professionally: "Up to that point I pretty much thought of music as something I loved, but also something that could never be more than a hobby. I am grateful to Timothy for revealing to me something I must already have known about myself on a deeper level: Music is what I was born to do."

Returning to the United States, Ericka honed her jazz performance skills working with musicians in the Washington D.C. area such as saxophonist Herb Smith and big band leader, Terrell Jones. A move to New Delhi, India brought her together with pianist Mosin Menezes. Ericka's collaboration with the Mosin Menezes Capital Swingers was fruitful and the group was a popular feature on the the New Delhi Jazz scene for several years.

Home once more, Ericka again became active on the local music scene. As a bandleader in her own right, Ericka is a perennial favorite at private parties and has performed in various area restaurants and cafes including return engagements at Blues Alley, D.C.'s premier jazz club. Ericka has participated with a star-studded lineup at the prestigious Chautauqua Jazz Festival in upstate New York and been the featured vocalist with several Washington area ensembles including the Larry Eanet Quartet with whom she collaborated on her debut recording: *Some Enchanted Evening*.

SASSY & BESSIE A-LIVE AT THE PARADISE LOUNGE

In early 2003 Ericka Ovette wrote and coproduced *Sassy & Bessie A-Live at the Paradise Lounge* with pianist Jerry Allen. Directed by Mark Dorman, this musical retrospective of the lives of Sarah Vaughan and Bessie Smith opened to a sold out crowd at the Lyceum in Alexandria, Virginia and spotlighted the musical talents of blues singer Ruby Hayes; bassist, Keter Betts; guitarist Paul Pieper; drummer, Chuck Redd; trumpeter Kenny Rittenhouse and saxophonist, Herb Smith. The original cast recording of the show is currently available on the Patuxent Label

ONE VOICE, ONE GUITAR

Ericka Ovette has frequently worked with guitarist Paul Pieper on duo sets reminiscent of the unforgettable pairing of Ella Fitzgerald and Joe Pass. While paying tribute to the great and enduring jazz standards, the pair are also known for surprising arrangements of pop and R&B classics. Ovette and Pieper continue to delight audiences at home and are fast gaining an international following. In 2003 they performed in Ecuador at the historic Teatro Bolivar, and the Club de Jazz in Santiago, Chile. Their 2004 European tour took them to Estonia, Slovenia, Austria, Czech Republic, Iceland, Kyrgystan and Turkey, where they performed in American Embassies and in local music venues. The pair plans to hit the road again in spring of 2008.

TAKES 2 TO TANGO

Working with co-producer Jerry Allen under the banner of Mostly Jazz Productions, Ericka created *Takes 2 to Tango*, in which she is paired with baritone Julian Hipkins in a show celebrating the great duets of Ella Fitzgerald & Louis Armstrong, Sarah Vaughan & Billy Eckstine, Dinah Washington & Brook Benton and Betty Carter & Ray Charles. The production was enlivened by a swinging sextet led by music director and pianist Jerry Allen and featuring Kenny Rittenhouse, trumpet; Herb Smith, alto Saxophone; Paul Pieper, guitar; Michael Bowie, bass; and Lenny Robinson, drums.

Once again the Lyceum in Old Town Alexandria was the venue for two very successful performances of the show on September 30, 2007. Directed by Mark Dorman, the production's mix of charming duets with beautiful solo numbers was an enormous hit. The success of the format has led Ms.Ovette to begin production on a new show featuring "Ovette & Hipkins" for winter 2008. In the meanwhile she expects to perform with "Ovette & Hipkins" at local events and festivals. Musical selections from *Takes 2 to Tango* are available on CD from Mostly Jazz Records